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THE SEIZURE OF THE SAUDI ARABIAN  
EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM

June 1973

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THE SEIZURE OF THE SAUDI ARABIAN  
EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM

Summary

In the early evening hours of 1 March 1973, eight Black September Organization (BSO) terrorists seized the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum as a diplomatic reception honoring the departing United States Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) was ending. After slightly wounding the United States Ambassador and the Belgian Charge d'Affaires, the terrorists took these officials plus the United States DCM, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador and the Jordanian Charge d'Affaires hostage. In return for the freedom of the hostages, the captors demanded the release of various individuals, mostly Palestinian guerrillas, imprisoned in Jordan, Israel and the United States.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Fatah representatives based in Khartoum participated in the attack, using a Fatah vehicle to transport the terrorists to the Saudi Arabian Embassy.

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Initially, the main objective of the attack appeared to be to secure the release of Fatah/BSO leader Muhammed Awadh (Abu Da'ud) from Jordanian captivity. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Negotiations with the BSO terrorist team were conducted primarily by the Sudanese Ministers of Interior and of Health. No effort was spared, within the capabilities of the Sudanese Government, to secure the freedom of the hostages. The terrorists extended their deadlines three times, but when they became convinced that their demands would not be met and after they reportedly had received orders from Fatah headquarters in Beirut, they killed the two United States officials and the Belgian Charge. Thirty-four hours later, upon receipt of orders from Yasir Arafat in Beirut to surrender, the

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terrorists released their other hostages unharmed and surrendered to Sudanese authorities.

The Khartoum operation again demonstrated the ability of the BSO to strike where least expected. The open participation of Fatah representatives in Khartoum in the attack provides further evidence of the Fatah/BSO relationship. The emergence of the United States as a primary fedayeen target indicates a serious threat of further incidents similar to that which occurred in Khartoum.

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EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM

Introduction

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Planning the Operation

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The attack in Khartoum was planned to occur on a national holiday celebrating the first anniversary of the end of the Sudanese Civil War, and on the occasion of a state visit by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.

There is no specific information to explain the BSO decision to strike on the occasion of the Saudi Ambassador's reception, nor to explain why the terrorists selected Ambassador Noel or Mr. Moore as their victims. Some reasons may be deduced, however.

The Saudi Ambassador is the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Khartoum and his farewell reception for Mr. Moore (a customary event for departing senior diplomats), to which all the senior diplomats in Khartoum were invited, could be expected to bring together all those in the Khartoum diplomatic community whom the terrorists wished to capture. Since the occasion was only for the diplomatic corps, there were no Sudanese guests. The terrorists quite possibly saw this as an advantage. Their initial statement from the captured Embassy noted that the operation was not directed at the Sudanese. Past Saudi receptions for departing chiefs of mission were always stag and the lack of dependents at the reception could eliminate possible complications. The Saudi Embassy itself is well suited for withstanding a siege. It does not have common walls nor is it in close proximity to other buildings. It has a high outer wall and an unobstructed view in all directions from the upstairs balconies. Since the Fatah representation in Khartoum was in diplomatic and social contact with other Arab diplomats locally, an Arab installation offered them better access for casing purposes than other non-Arab installations where the targeted diplomats may have gathered. Finally,

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the terrorists also may have anticipated that the Sudanese security services would be heavily committed in protecting the visiting Ethiopian Emperor.

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Preparations for the Attack



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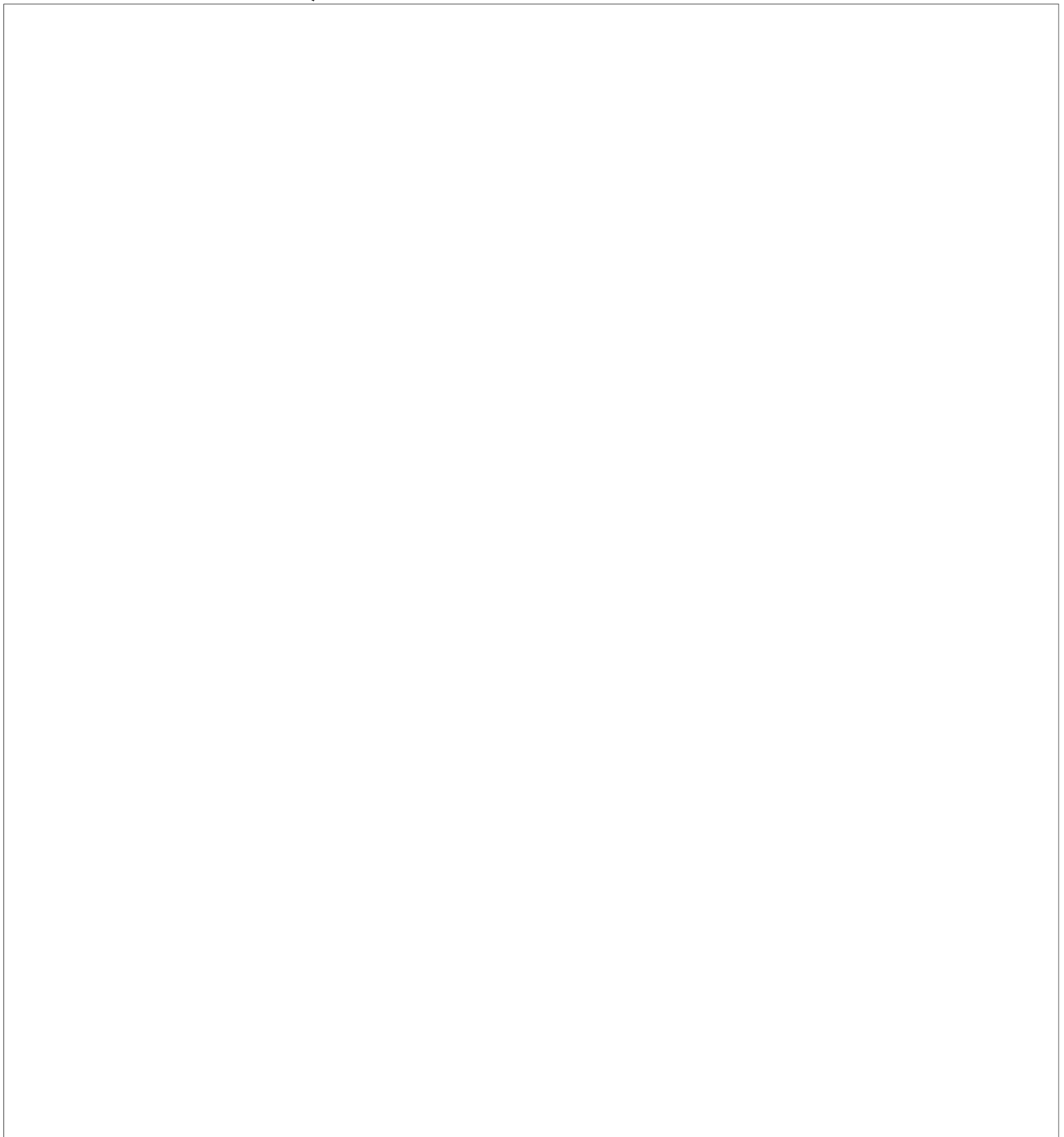
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The Attack

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At about 1850 hours the Landrover pulled into the driveway of the Saudi Embassy as United States Ambassador Cleo A. Noel, Jr. was departing. The Landrover rammed and effectively blocked Noel's car. The terrorists leapt out firing their weapons, and slightly wounded the American Ambassador and the Belgian Charge, Guy Eid. In the confusion several guests, including the Dutch Charge and the Ambassador of the Soviet Union, escaped. Other guests, including the Japanese and Spanish Ambassadors, were captured but released when the terrorists determined that they were from "friendly" countries.

Having seized the Embassy and the hostages, the terrorists set about implementing their tasks. They demanded the release of Muhammad Awadh (Abu Da'ud), certain military prisoners implicated in earlier threats against the Jordanian Government and other imprisoned fedayeen. Other demands were for the

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release of Sirhan Sirhan from the United States and the release of the two women involved in the Sabena hijacking of May 1972, who are imprisoned in Israel. The terrorists threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met.

The Siege and the Negotiations

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Negotiations for the hostages' release were begun immediately after their capture. Heavily armed troops and police quickly surrounded the Embassy. The Sudanese Ministers of Interior and Health were the chief negotiators. Most of their contact with the terrorists was by telephone or through bull-horn exchanges between the terrorists in the Embassy and one of the negotiators outside. The Minister of Health had one two-hour meeting inside the Embassy with the terrorists, which appears to have been the only extended face-to-face exchange between the terrorists and the negotiators. The only other person who was able to enter the Embassy and converse with the terrorists was the Sudanese doctor who treated the wounds of Ambassador Noel and Mr. Eid and the injury to Mr. Moore.

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The Sudanese made one final unsuccessful attempt to dissuade the terrorists after the final deadline, asking them to wait until the arrival of high-ranking United States officials.

When the terrorists were ordered to kill the three diplomats, the victims were instructed to write their wills and last letters to their wives. A request by Ambassador Noel to call his wife was rejected. At 2100 hours local time on 2 March 1973, the three Western diplomats were taken into the basement of the Saudi Embassy and machine-gunned to death.

The two Americans were key targets of the terrorists, as previously noted, and their murder appears to have been planned

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from the beginning.

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The life of the Jordanian Charge may have been spared because of his Palestinian origin and a family relationship with the widow of a senior Fatah official. There appears to have been no intention to harm the Saudi Ambassador or his family. The Ambassador's children were released 19 hours after the seizure. His wife was allowed to stay and both had the run of the Embassy. One of the terrorists, when queried by the Jordanian Charge as to why no restrictions were imposed on the Saudi Ambassador and his wife, replied that the terrorists had received special instructions regarding the treatment of the Ambassador and his wife.

Despite murdering the three hostages the BSO team still believed that they would be allowed to leave the Sudan freely, and they demanded that they be flown out of the Sudan with the remaining hostages. The Sudanese refused and demanded that the terrorists surrender and release the remaining hostages unharmed. With water, electricity and the telephone cut off, the terrorists became less and less confident that they would escape.

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### Conclusions

The Khartoum operation again proved the capability of the BSO to strike at a place and time of its own choosing.

Fedayeen terrorists and guerrillas have conducted operations against Jordanian officials and installations since September 1971, but the Khartoum attack showed a willingness to strike at an embassy of a country which had provided financial support to Fatah and do it in an Arab country with a government friendly to Fatah.

As in most BSO operations outside Israel, the attack took place in a country which hosted Fatah and PLO representatives. In this instance, however, for the first time a local Fatah office was openly involved in the planning and execution of an attack.

As in Bangkok, which also was considered an unlikely place for an Arab terrorist operation, the attack in Khartoum caught its victims completely by surprise and occurred on a day of national celebration.

The Khartoum murder of the three hostages re-established the credibility of BSO threats to kill hostages. The murders, furthermore, were the first instances in which a BSO threat to kill hostages in cold blood was carried out without some outside influence such as that which occurred at Munich when West German authorities attempted to secure the release of Israeli hostages by shooting the BSO terrorist team.

Although the slaughter of the three hostages was repugnant to many Arabs, the attack succeeded in boosting the morale of some supporters of the Palestinian movement by removing the stigma of recent failures, most notably at Bangkok, and by showing the world in general and the Arab population in particular that fedayeen terrorists could strike at United States interests with impunity. There have since been reports from reliable sources that United States officials and installations are now primary targets of the fedayeen terrorists.

These results were not gained without some costs. The direct and open involvement of the Fatah representatives in Khartoum in the operation has resulted in the loss of the aura

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of "moderation" which Fatah leaders had sought to project to the world. The incident further demonstrated that Fatah and the BSO are one and the same.

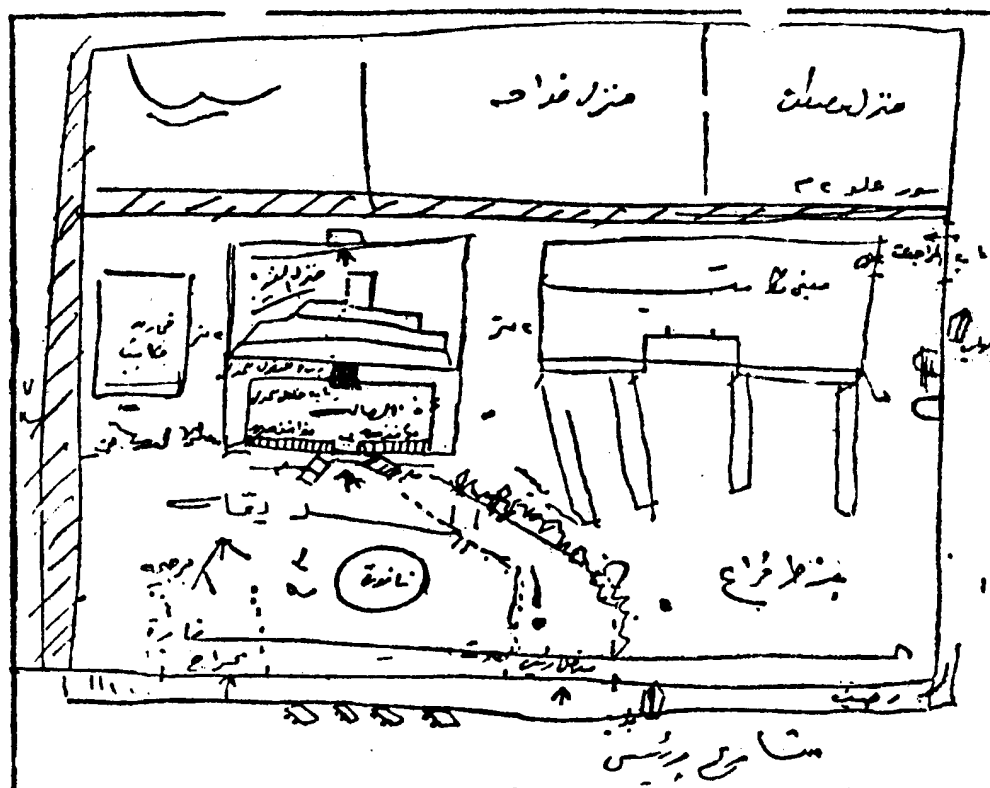


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Crude sketch plan of Saudi Arabian embassy, drawn for guidance of terrorist squad by Al Fatah representative in Khartoum, Fawaz Yassin Abdel Rahman. Sudanese police found it when they raided his office. Below, transliteration of the plan. 1, Stores block is actually about same size as main building; 2, pyramid effect crudely represents four-storey embassy; 3, rough indication of office block on pillars.

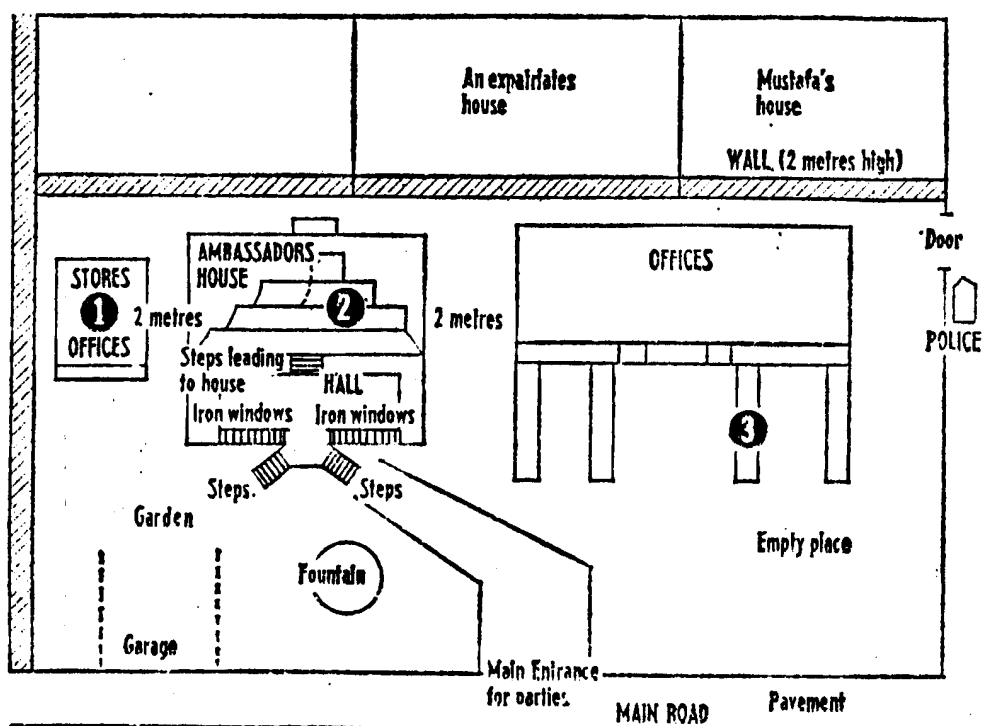


Figure 1: Plan of the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum, Prepared by the Local Fatah Representative.

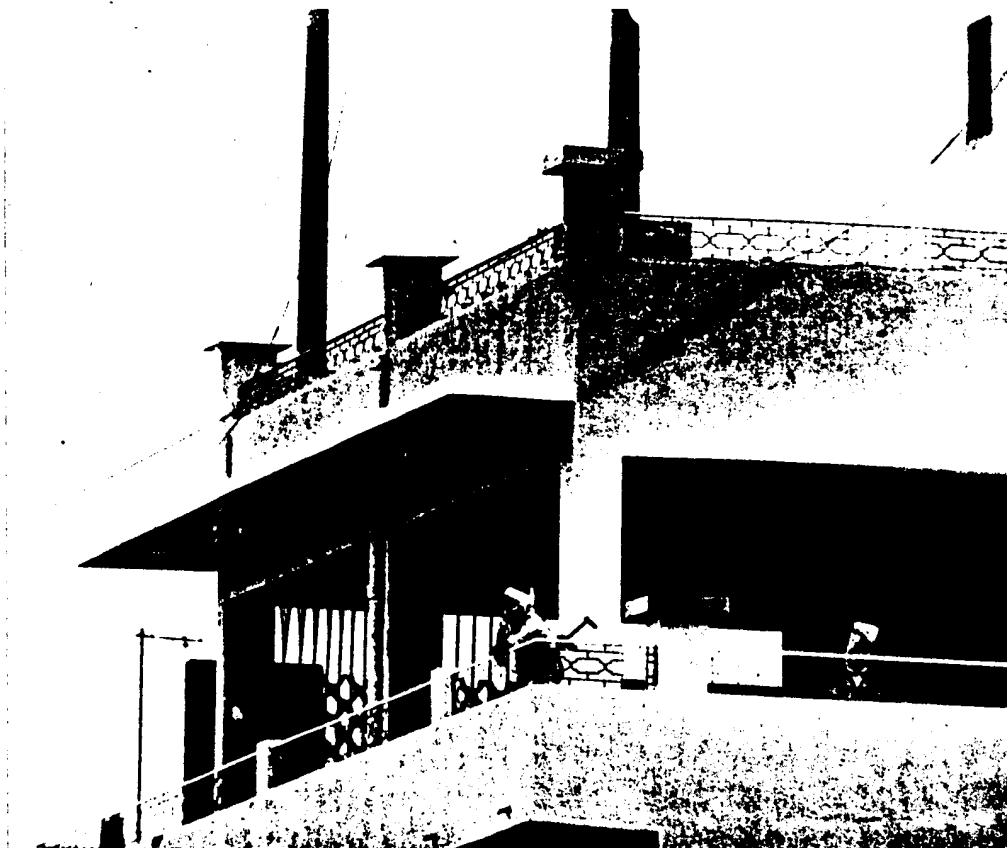


Figure 2: Fatah Terrorists in the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum.

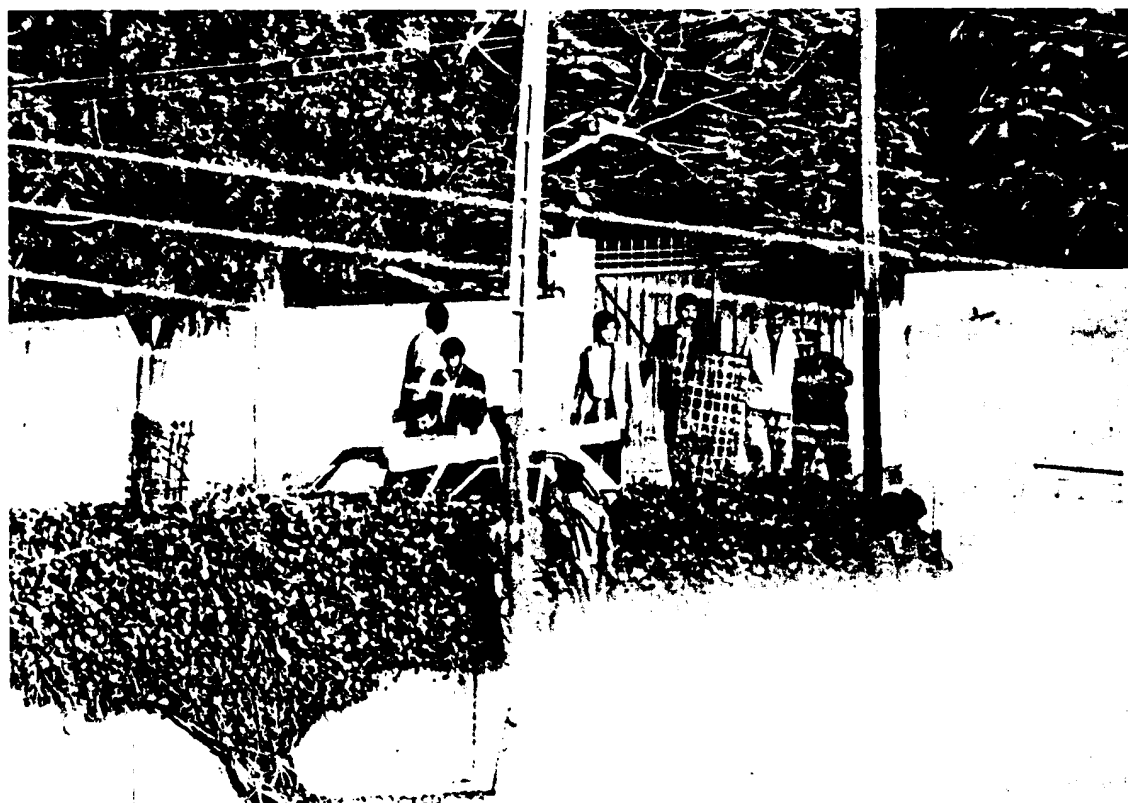
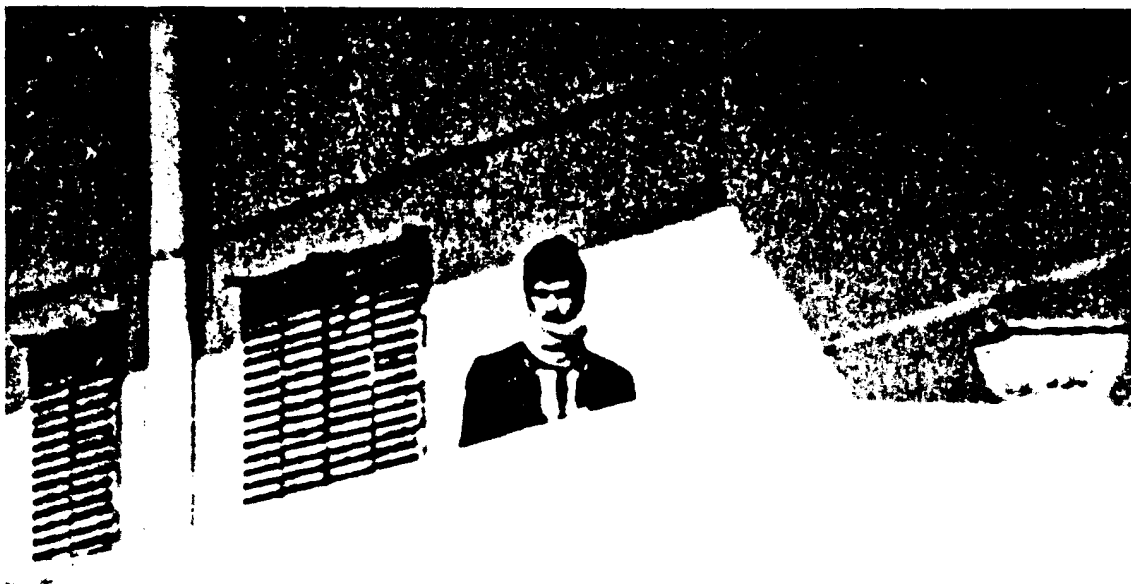


Figure 3: Surrender of the Fatah/BSO Terrorist Team to Sudanese Authorities.



**Figure 4: One of the Khartoum Terrorists**



Figure 5: Photograph of Palestinian contacts of Fawaz Yassein Al-Rahman found in The Roxy Hotel in Khartoum. Al-Rahman, Rizig El Qas and Karam Mahmoud Azzam are identified, as are two of the persons suspected of having surveilled United States Embassy personnel.

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